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## U.S. will push to renew aid for contras

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WASHINGTON — A report prepared by the Pentagon suggests that any weakening of the U.S. stance in Central America and the Caribbean would contribute to Soviet attempts to destabilize the region and undermine the overall American defense posture.

The report, which has not yet been made public, is expected to be part of a massive Reagan administration lobbying campaign to convince Congress that a threat to Central America by the Soviet Union, Cuba and Nicaragua requires restoration of American military aid to the Nicaraguan rebels known as contras.

But Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., new chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, predicted Wednesday that Congress will refuse any requests from President Reagan to restore covert aid to the contras.

The administration is expected to ask that a current ban on U.S. aid be lifted late next month. But Lugar, in a speech at the National Press Club, said: "The covert aid situation, I suspect, is not a viable proposition."

Instead, Lugar said he believes the United States is "on the threshold of a new situation" in which the leftist Sandinista leaders are likely to halt exporting revolution to other Central American countries like El Salvador.

The senator predicted that Nicaragua will also pledge not to become a military base for the Soviet Union.

Ways must be found, Lugar said, for the United States to apply leverage to the Sandinistas, but not through secret assistance to the guerrillas supported previously by the CIA.

Some key administration figures hope their lobbying campaign will lead to open U.S. military help for the contras, unlike the clandestine CIA aid that Congress cut off last year when it led to the mining of Nicaraguan harbors and other widely criticized measures.

One senior administration official acknowledged that the lobbying effort is designed, in part, to convince the American people as well as Congress that the contras are as worthy of support as the Moslem guerrillas who receive U.S. aid to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan.

"We are also fighting the Soviet Union in Nicaragua," said Adolfo Calero, political leader of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN), the largest contra army. "We are like the Afghans. There is no difference."

Opponents of Reagan's Central America policies have organized a counter-lobbying drive aimed at making sure that Congress maintains the aid ban.

Their strategy, the opposite of the administration's, is to paint Nicaragua as a victim of U.S. aggression and the contras as terrorists undeserving of American support.

Thus the stage is set for an extraordinary propaganda war to win the hearts and minds of the 535 members of Congress, a high-stakes showdown that could make or break Reagan's Central America policy.

The draft of the Pentagon report clearly states the administration approach to the Central American issue. "The countries of the region, struggling to develop pluralistic political systems, are confronted with Soviet-backed insurgent movements attempting to seize power," says the 23-page document tentatively called *The Soviet-Cuban Connection*.

"The Soviets see the area and its problems as the potential Achilles heel of the United States, and are making an intensive effort to exploit the poverty and inequities of the region for their political advantage. Kremlin leaders hope that ultimately the United States could become so preoccupied with chaos on its doorstep that it would be forced to shift dramatically its military forces, thereby opening new possibilities for the Soviet Union in other key areas of the world."

As part of this strategy, the report says, "the opportunistic Soviets are using Cuba and Nicaragua to exploit the instability in the area [and] to that end these three countries are working in concert in training, supplying and supporting guerrilla organizations in countries throughout the area."

Officials said the report is part of an overall strategy to bombard Congress and the nation with white papers, speeches, press briefings and news leaks — all designed to portray Cuba and Nicaragua as threats to national security. In particular, the administration wants to depict Nicaragua as an emerging Soviet and Cuban outpost and to present the Nicaraguan rebels as freedom fighters struggling to liberate their homeland from Soviet-Cuban domination.

For the moment, it appears likely that the contras will go it alone, however, or at least make do with private aid and foreign government support as is now the case. The reason: Congress is still in no mood to change its mind.

Sen. David Durenberger, R-Minn., and Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., new leaders of the Senate and House Intelligence Committees that oversee contra aid, agreed that the covert program as such is dead. In fact, both said they will lobby and vote against any attempt to resurrect it.